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ABSTRACT

American schools, despite recent education reform measures, still fail to provide many of our nation's children with the education that they need and deserve. In conjunction with the other changes, programs of choice can play a central and critical role in improving America's schools. This booklet, divided into two sections, reports on the proceedings at the White House Workshop on Choice in Education on January 10, 1989. The workshop, held in Washington, D.C., was hosted jointly by the White House and the United States Department of Education. The report outlines the benefits--discussed by educators, policymakers, and student--that can be won when programs of choice are carefully planned, developed, and monitored. Section 1 provides the reasons for conducting a workshop on choice, introduces the two dominant themes that emerged during the workshop, and details eight programs of choice already in operation around the nation. Section 2 explores the benefits of school choice through an examination of the themes of school improvement and parental empowerment discussed during the workshop. At the conclusion of this document are remarks by President Ronald Reagan, President-elect George Bush, United States Secretary of Education Lauro F. Cavazos, Minnesota Governor Rudy Perpich, and Wisconsin Governor Thommy G. Thompson. (24 references) (KM)

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A Report based on
the White House Workshop on Choice in Education

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IMPROVING SCHOOLS AND EMPOWERING PARENTS:

CHOICE IN AMERICAN EDUCATION

A Report based on
the White House Workshop on Choice in Education

By Nancy Paulu
Programs for the Improvement of Practice

October 1989

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Foreword

By any measure one wishes to apply, American schools still fail to provide many of our Nation's children with the education they need and deserve. Standardized test scores used to chart student performance have declined or remained static during the past three years. U.S. students score low in math and science when compared with their peers in other industrialized nations. The high school dropout rate remains unacceptably high.

Education reform measures have not generated the progress we need. It is now time to make basic structural changes in our system of education. President Bush and I view school choice as the cornerstone for restructuring America's system of elementary and secondary education.

To demonstrate the value of choice, the White House and the U.S. Department of Education hosted a workshop on January 10, 1989. Educators, policymakers, and students from throughout the country gathered in Washington, D.C., to discuss choice and study the possibilities of implementing this program in individual States and districts. This booklet reports on the proceedings at the workshop and outlines the benefits that can be won when programs of choice are carefully planned, developed, and monitored.

The evidence favoring choice is too compelling to ignore. Often States and districts have implemented choice programs and witnessed dramatic educational improvements. Dropout rates decline. Teacher satisfaction improves. Test scores rise. Student behavior and attendance improve. Parents become more involved in their children's education.

Choice is successful because it improves schools from the bottom up. It encourages schools to develop distinctive "flavors" and unique qualities that meet the needs of students. Choice allows each school to excel at something special, rather than sinking to the lowest common denominator and suiting few.

No children, no matter their circumstances, should be held captive in a school that fails to meet their needs or is not doing a good job of educating. Choice offers youngsters a chance for a better education—and for a better life.

Lauro F. Cavazos
U.S. Secretary of Education

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And a special thank you to the educators and policymakers around the country who contributed helpful information. They include Mary Anne Raywid, professor of education at Hofstra University; Joe Nathan, senior fellow at the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota; Patrice Vick, spokesperson for Minnesota Governor Rudy Perpich; and Tom Fonfara, policy advisor for Wisconsin Governor Tommy G. Thompson. Finally, I wish to thank the superintendents and staff members who provided descriptions of programs of choice in the following districts: Boston, Massachusetts; Cambridge, Massachusetts; East Harlem, New York; Eugene, Oregon; and Richmond, California. It is the dedication and hard work of educators in communities like these that ultimately can make programs of choice succeed.

The photographs in this book were provided by the Office of the Governor, State of Minnesota; Community School District 4, East Harlem, New York; the Cambridge School Department, Cambridge, Massachusetts; and Eugene School District 4J, Eugene, Oregon.

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PART 1

White House Workshop on Choice in Education

Why a Workshop on Choice?

"He is free who lives as he chooses," the Greek philosopher Epictetus wrote in *Discourses*. Almost 2,000 years later, Americans still hold firmly to this ancient but timeless ideal. To be an American means to have choices. We decide what house to buy, spouse to marry, books to read, and church or synagogue to join.

Yet ironically, we are often powerless to make one decision with a profound and enduring effect—where to send our children to school. In most communities, youngsters are routinely assigned by their local district to the one nearest their home. If the school is academically weak, unsafe, or inappropriate for a particular student, parents have little recourse.

Slowly, the educational winds are shifting: The same public demands for better educational opportunities that precipitated the "excellence" reform movement continue today, and parent choice in education is increasingly the focus of such demands. The question has moved from "Should we have choice?" to "What type of choice should we have?" This change is reflected in a 1987 Gallup Poll in which 71 percent of the respondents believed they should be able to select the local schools their children attend. Already, at least 25 States have taken or are considering steps to provide choice plans designed to empower parents, ensure academic excellence, and enhance opportunities for our Nation's youth.

With these ends in mind, policymakers, educators, parents, and students from across the country met on January 10, 1989, in Washington, D.C., for the White House Workshop on Choice in Education. In his address to the group of about 200, President-elect George Bush explained:

> *It's time for a second great wave of education reform—not helter-skelter, not here and there, but everywhere: in every State, every district, for every school and every student in America. Those good and tested reform ideas of recent years must become universal—universally understood and applied and thus universally enjoyed by our children. Certainly among the most promising of these ideas—perhaps the single most promising—is choice.*[1]

President Ronald Reagan was similarly enthusiastic. "Choice works, and it works with a vengeance," the President said. He continued:

> *Choice recognizes the principle that there is no one best way for all of us. It allows schools to excel at something special, rather than trying—and failing—to be all things to all people.*

U.S. Secretary of Education Lauro F. Cavazos agreed that choice can hold the key to better schools:

[S]ome of the most encouraging signs in the educational community have come from the States and from the localities that permitted parents and children to choose the schools that they believe will best serve their needs.

These leaders did not come to impose guidelines or recommend specific ways to develop plans of choice. They recognize that what works in one State or one district may not in another. Instead, the White House and the U.S. Department of Education planned this gathering to allow those interested in choice to share ideas and learn from one another. On the January 10 evening news, ABC News Correspondent Bill Blakemore explained the workshop's significance:

By endorsing the concept of choice in education at the White House today, George Bush gave a big push to a reform movement that could mean the restructuring of many elementary and high schools across the Nation.[2]

The drive for choice is propelled by diverse interests and philosophies. Workshop participants represent a wide range of economic levels and political persuasions. Some would expand parent choice only among public schools; others believe it should extend to private schools, too. Some see choice principally as a way to inject a dose of free enterprise into education; some see it as the expression of democracy in America; some view it as an issue of equity—as a way to assure that poor Americans have the same educational opportunities as the rich. Many favor choice for some combination of these reasons.

Two Themes of the Workshop

Two interwoven themes dominated the workshop discussion: **improving schools** and **empowering parents**. Workshop participants believe our schools must do a better job of preparing youngsters for life in the 21st century, and they look to programs of choice to accomplish this goal by:

1. Bringing basic structural change to our schools;
2. Recognizing students' individuality;
3. Fostering competition and accountability;
4. Improving educational outcomes; and
5. Keeping potential dropouts in school.

Workshop participants also agreed that improving schools requires cooperation from parents. This in turn requires that mothers and fathers be given more power to make educational decisions affecting their children. Good schools of choice can help make this happen by:

6. Increasing parents' freedom;
7. Increasing parent satisfaction and involvement with schools; and
8. Enhancing educational opportunities, particularly for disadvantaged parents.

These eight benefits of choice are detailed in part 2 of this booklet.

Programs of Choice

Educators wishing to create programs of choice can learn from the growing range of outstanding programs already operating. Some choice programs expand options within a school district; others provide choice across district lines. Most States only offer choice among public schools; a few extend the choice to include private, nonsectarian programs. Most State plans involve only elementary and secondary schools; a few enable high school students to take courses at postsecondary institutions. The following programs are but a few of those currently providing youngsters with educational options:

Minnesota

Minnesota has developed what has become the most comprehensive system of public school choice in the country. In an address to participants, Governor Rudy Perpich described his State's efforts. The Postsecondary Options Program began in 1985 by allowing high school juniors and seniors to take postsecondary classes at State expense. These credits count toward high school graduation. Once students have graduated from high school, they can ask postsecondary institutions to accept these credits.

The choice system was expanded during the 1987–88 school year to allow dropouts and students at risk of dropping out to choose among a variety of educational alternatives—area learning centers, college courses, alternative schools, and classes in other school districts. In the fall of 1988, this High School Graduation Incentives Program was broadened to include adult dropouts over 21 years old.

A third aspect of the Minnesota choice system allows youngsters in grades K–12 to attend the school of their choice outside their own districts so long as the receiving district has room and the movement will not disrupt racial balances. When Open Enrollment

Minnesota Public Schools.

Pilgrim Lane Elementary School (Minnesota) students learn reading via an interactive cable system.

began in 1987, districts could choose whether or not to participate. By 1990, however, all districts will be required to allow students to leave (although districts are not obligated to accept students from outside their geographic boundaries, particularly if this would disrupt desegregation). In all three parts of the Minnesota choice program, State revenue follows the students.

East Harlem, New York

District 4 schools in East Harlem were once best known for their drug dealers, high dropout rates, and the lowest reading and math scores of all the 32 districts in New York City. "All the things you associate with a failing school system—we were number one," recalls Sy Fliegel, a former East Harlem school administrator who was chief architect of the district's 15-year-old program of choice.[3]

This program is widely credited with helping to turn the district around. Today, East Harlem allows students to choose from among 50 programs in 23 buildings, which have been so successful that they draw many students from well-to-do areas outside the district who might otherwise attend private schools.

The 50 thematic schools range from the Jose Feliciano School for the Performing Arts, to the Academy of Environmental Sciences, to the Isaac Newton School for Science and Mathematics, to the School of Science and Humanities. East Harlem also allows its school directors and teachers to participate in the hiring of new faculty members and to help schedule courses and design programs.

Signs of the program's success are everywhere: teacher morale is high, visitors report that hallways are orderly, vandalism and

Dissection project, East Harlem Career Academy.

Elementary science students, East Harlem.

truancy are down significantly, and test scores have risen dramatically.

Cambridge, Massachusetts

Cambridge parents can select from among any of the district's 13 elementary schools. Children are assigned on a first-come, first-served basis, providing space is available and subject to desegregation constraints.

When enrollment dropped in several schools, this signalled a critical need for school improvements. In response, the district administration assigned a new principal and revised the curriculum in one such school. After several years, this same school ranked first among the city's elementary schools in a test of basic skills, and enrollment has increased.

The district's Parent Information Center is a key to the program's success, according to school officials. The center provides parents with the information they need to select the best schools for their children. It also allows for central registration, which ensures that one set of rules is applied consistently.

"Everyone must be treated fairly, and feel they are being treated fairly," reports Robert Peterkin, former Cambridge Superintendent who is now in charge of the Milwaukee schools. "When a Boston Celtics player registered his child recently, he received the same information and treatment and experienced the same assignment process as did a welfare mother from the Jefferson Park housing project."[4]

St. Paul, Minnesota

St. Paul has an extensive choice program. The district began pairing schools and providing a few magnet programs in the early 1970s to ease integration. As the minority enrollment grew, however, school officials recognized that a more

King School (Cambridge, Massachusetts) student prepares artwork to celebrate Haitian heritage.

Field trip to the zoo from Fitzgerald School, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

comprehensive plan was needed for the district to stay within State desegregation guidelines. Parents, other community members, and staff worked together beginning in 1984 to develop such a program, which has expanded rapidly since then.

By the fall of 1989, the program will provide magnet programs in about half of the district's 38 elementary and 17 junior and senior high schools. Schools focus on a broad range of areas, such as gifted and talented instruction, Spanish, Chinese, creative arts, performing arts, humanities, and science and technology.

School officials credit the magnet schools with allowing the district to stay within desegregation guidelines and with improving the quality of its education. Student test scores have risen, in some schools dramatically. And the magnets have drawn some students back from private and parochial schools.

Eugene, Oregon

Unlike most others that began in the 1970s, Eugene's extensive choice program was not developed to ease desegregation. (Only 6 percent of Eugene's students are minority.) Instead, it grew out of the district's desire "to give parents and teachers a chance to develop something different from the standard curriculum," according to Robert D. Stalick, Eugene's assistant superintendent for instruction.

This fall the district will operate 12 alternative schools in addition to its 25 regular ones. The schools of choice range from the Leonardo da Vinci Middle School, where computer technology is integrated into the curriculum, to Yujin Gakuen, which is one of the Nation's first Japanese immersion schools, in which students receive all or much of their instruction in Japanese.

Eugene also has an open enrollment policy, which allows students not enrolled in alternative schools to attend

Field trip to study stream ecology. Evergreen Alternative School, Eugene, Oregon.

Celebrating a national holiday, Eugene, Oregon.

the regular school of their choice. Between 600 and 800 of the district's 17,000 students take advantage of this option. "It's amazing what this does to the schools that aren't what they ought to be," Stalick said. "It's encouraged them to improve the way they deal with parents, and the quality of their curriculum."

Boston, Massachusetts

Boston is starting a "controlled choice" student assignment plan in September 1989. In about a dozen cities, this relatively new desegregation method is being used to lessen the need for mandatory busing. In Boston, the city has been divided into 3 zones for elementary and middle schools (and 1 zone for high school), each approximately balanced as to enrollments and racial composition. Parents state a preference for five schools, and school officials then match youngsters with programs, taking racial balances into account.

Richmond, California

The Richmond Unified School District began schools of choice in the fall of 1987 to deal with longstanding troubles. "We had serious problems with attendance, student achievement, suspensions, expulsions," Superintendent Walter L. Marks explained. "It was terrible, the track record we had."

In designing a choice program, school officials had to make certain that the offerings were diverse enough to accommodate the district's eclectic student body; Richmond draws students from all points on the economic spectrum and is ethnically mixed.

Richmond's A System for Choice requires that all students study a basic core curriculum including reading and language arts, mathematics, sciences, history, and social studies. However, children have their choice of the kind of school in which they study these and other subjects. These specialty schools range from classical studies, to international studies, to "future studies" (high technology), to Montessori. Each program is offered at one or more schools.

Richmond has also adopted an open enrollment policy, allowing parents to enroll their children in any school offering the specialty program they have selected. If a school is near capacity, children living close by get first priority.

Since the choice program began in Richmond, student test scores on State language arts, reading, and mathematics tests have risen, and unexcused absences and expulsions have dropped. And many observers credit the program with helping to improve the district's image.

Critics contend that the choice program was developed too quickly, and that it provides too many "frills." But more often, says Superintendent Marks, "we hear that these schools are the best things that ever happened to kids."

Many other States and districts are not yet operating their choice programs but expect or hope to be shortly:

Arkansas, Iowa, and Nebraska

Arkansas, Iowa, and Nebraska all recently passed open enrollment measures to take effect during the 1990–91 school year. In a manner that is similar to the funding provisions in Minnesota, dollars in these three States will follow the students to the district in which they will attend school. And Ohio approved an education reform bill in June 1989 that includes a postsecondary enrollment options program similar to Minnesota's. Another part of the Ohio bill will require all districts to adopt open enrollment policies by June 1993 that will allow students to attend other district schools, assuming this would not disrupt racial balances. Districts must also decide by this date whether to allow intradistrict transfers with adjacent school systems.

Wisconsin's Governor Tommy G. Thompson is continuing to seek approval for a choice program. One part would allow low-income Milwaukee children in kindergarten through 6th grade to attend any public or nonsectarian private school in Milwaukee County. Another part would enable students throughout Wisconsin to attend any public school in any district in the State, providing the school boards of both districts have agreed to participate in the program and space is available. As with the Minnesota program, students could be turned away if their presence would upset racial balances.

A Reform Holding Great Promise

In a free society, choice is valuable for its own sake. But the promise of choice in education is also in its ability to catalyze changes in how our schools are operated.

The changes that choice can bring to education cannot be expected to spring up overnight. It takes time—to design programs suitable for a particular community, to gain support for the programs, to implement the programs, and to smooth out all the program's wrinkles.

Nor can major changes be expected without strong leadership—from the governor, the State legislature, superintendents, principals, business people, and parents. Workshop participant Jackie Wilson, director of the Office for the Black Secretariat for the Archdiocese of Washington, D.C., noted the need for leaders at many levels:

> *The success of any . . . reform is based on . . . the competence and the quality and the determination of the teachers and the administrators and . . . the higher-ups, too—the superintendents and even the legislators.*

Programs of choice must also be planned with the understanding that they cannot cure all ills of American schools. "If we begin to think that [choice plans] are a panacea, we're in for a lot of disappointments," notes Sy Fliegel, the former East Harlem school administrator and now an education consultant and senior fellow of the Manhattan Institute in New York City. Additional improvements must accompany programs of choice. As President-elect Bush said:

> *[O]ther reforms are going to be necessary to make choice meaningful. Greater autonomy and authority for teachers and prin-*

cipals, for example, along with better publicized and more reliable measurements of school performance.

In conjunction with other changes, programs of choice can play a central and critical role in improving American schools—and in giving parents the power to decide how best to educate their children. The following section describes how programs of choice can make this happen.

PART 2

Benefits of Choice

Participants at the White House Workshop on Choice in Education agree that choice programs can benefit children in innumerable ways. But they warn that these benefits are most likely to materialize when the programs are intelligently planned, implemented, and monitored. "We should extend parent choice, but we need to do it with care and with integrity," explained Charles Glenn, Jr., executive director of the Office of Educational Equity in the Massachusetts Department of Education.

When educators and policymakers proceed with these thoughts in mind, programs of choice can improve schools and empower parents.

Improving Schools

In a speech delivered in May 1989 to the Education Press Association, Secretary Cavazos deplored the Nation's three deficits—its budget deficit, trade deficit, and education deficit. The first two cannot be resolved without addressing the third, he said, which is reflected in many ways: by the Nation's 27 million illiterate adults, its declining or static SAT and ACT scores, and its 28 percent high school dropout rate.

These and other discouraging statistics can best be reversed by making basic organizational changes in public education, he said, concluding that "I consider choice the cornerstone to restructuring elementary and secondary education in this country."

Workshop participants discussed five ways in which choice can improve our schools. Restructuring was the first of them.

1. Choice can bring basic structural change to our schools.

Scholars and others studying American education have noted what Secretary Cavazos describes as "a remarkable national uniformity in the methods and organization of our schools." Although we have begun to see more diversity, most American schools remain controlled by politicians and administrators in a central office. Educators in individual schools still have little say in key decisions.

This has profound and unfortunate consequences for American education, according to John Chubb, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution and a workshop participant. In a study of American high schools, Chubb and his associates found that good schools have more autonomy and possess the power to influence their own educational policy. He writes:

> *Those organizational qualities that we consider to be essential ingredients of an effective school—such things as academically focused objectives, pedagogically strong principals, relatively autonomous teachers, and collegial staff relations—do not*

flourish without the willingness of superintendents, school boards, and other outside authorities to delegate meaningful control over school policy, personnel, and practice to the school itself.[5]

School administrators are reluctant to allow school autonomy because, Chubb explains, this might "threaten the security of political representatives and education administrators whose positions are tied to the existing system and who now hold the reins of school reform."

Schools will not improve until the balance of power shifts, Chubb concludes—and programs of choice provide the best avenue to making this happen. Schools of choice diverge from the organization of most conventional schools in several ways, he says. The roles of their staff members and administrators are generally less delineated and more flexible; teams of people in schools of choice make decisions on everything from budgets to curriculum. Teachers in schools of choice assume more power over their professional lives, which contributes to their reporting higher levels of job satisfaction and having better attendance records. Other researchers report that giving teachers more autonomy improves their relationships with students and provides teachers with more leeway to tailor their instruction to individual circumstances.

Chubb reported in his high school study that all things being equal, students in schools that are extensively controlled by politicians and administrators in a central office learned about one year less academically during high school than those in schools with more autonomy to make decisions that affect them.

Schools of choice, in short, help to create organizations in which educators, parents, and students cooperate with one another and become more involved in their schools. And this encourages them to invest more of themselves. Former East Harlem administrator Sy Fliegel explained to program participants:

[I]t's an old capitalist idea that people just treat what they own much better than things that they don't own. So, in our schools, you see very little graffiti, even though they're old buildings . . . . There's a respect. In our schools, you can walk through a junior high school and bulletin boards will not be touched.

2. Schools of choice recognize individuality.

Americans celebrate many traditions, personalities, hopes, and strengths. Yet historically, American schools have been based on the premise that there is "one best way" to educate students. Educators are now coming to recognize that youngsters require different settings. Wisconsin's Governor Thompson told workshop participants:

The concept of parental choice recognizes that children are not all the same. They have individual talents and specialized needs. [In schools of choice] children would no longer be assigned to schools as if they were all the same. Schools could design curricula to meet specialized needs.

Minnesota's Governor Perpich explained the advantages of matching student to school:

> *There are many students in the Nation . . . who simply need a change of scenery, a community of people that better suits their needs. When students find their niche, and when they find a school in which they feel at home, the evidence is showing that they thrive.*

Stacy Condon from Minnesota is one such student. The Minnesota governor reported:

> *She was a very bright student who was frustrated with her teachers and the learning atmosphere in her school. Two years ago, she was ranked in the lower third of her class and had announced to her parents that she was quitting school at the age of 16 to become a drummer in a rock band. But her mother read the ad about our Postsecondary Options Program and encouraged her to try it. . . . Last June . . . Stacy Condon simultaneously graduated from high school and completed her first year of college with a full 45 credits and a high B average.*

Programs of choice recognize differences not only among students, but also among teachers and educators. They, too, work best in atmospheres that suit them. Joe Nathan, a senior fellow at Minnesota's Hubert Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs and the editor of *Public Schools by Choice*,[6] noted at the workshop:

> *[T]here is no one best school that is going to meet the needs of all kids, regardless of how terrific it is, or that is going to do well for all teachers. . . . My wife is a public school teacher. She hates the idea of working with junior high school kids. She loves working with severely and profoundly handicapped children. She wouldn't like a Montessori program. I like working in an open*

East Harlem.

Harbor Junior High School for the Performing Arts, New York. Copyright, Jane Hoffer, 1988

Corridor Alternative School, Eugene, Oregon.

school. There are other teachers who hate those kinds of programs.

3. Choice fosters competition and accountability.

Many educators believe students benefit from competition because it fosters educational excellence. The National Governors' Association wrote in its 1986 report, *Time for Results*:

> *If we first implement choice, true choice among public schools, we unlock the values of competition in the marketplace. Schools that compete for students, teachers, and dollars will, by virtue of the environment, make those changes that will allow them to succeed. Schools will, in fact, set the pace, forcing governors and other policymakers to keep up.*

These sentiments were expressed at the workshop by Jackie Ducote, executive vice president of the Louisiana Association of Business and Industry:

> *I believe that competition can be the catalyst to make our system of public education in the United States second to none, and that choice can be the glue to make sure that it stays that way.*

Fourteen-year-old Andre Lawrence from New York City told workshop participants how he believes competition ultimately benefits students. "I was very happy to decide which school I wanted to attend," he explained. "It was like shopping, buying a pair of shoes, shopping around until you found something you like."

While some critics fear that choice will strand poor youngsters in disadvantaged schools, workshop participants argue just the opposite. They say that requiring schools to compete for students encourages those providing substandard education to be more accountable for their educational programs. Ultimately this may force educators either to make needed improvements or risk folding. District 4 in New York has closed schools with declining enrollments. But this need not be the end result; changing a principal or moving teachers in or out may be all that's needed to revive an ineffective school.

Workshop participants agreed that competition does not have to be ruthless. Denis Doyle, a senior research fellow at the Hudson Institute in Washington, D.C., and an authority on education policy, explained:

> *[T]here is in the popular mind a vision of cutthroat competition, of profit-taking buccaneers swashbuckling across the State, people who are . . . merciless, kind of* Atlas Shrugged/*Ayn Rand types. Well, there certainly is that type of competition, but there is competition which is closer to home . . . and that is the competition which emphasized the supremacy of the consumer, consumer sovereignty, and that, in fact, is what competition is all about.*

4. Choice can improve educational outcomes.

"Family background, economic status, [and] residence all matter a great deal in determining whether a youngster will succeed in school,"

writes Mary Anne Raywid, a professor at Hofstra University who has spent more than a decade studying schools of choice. "But," she continues, "it is possible that the particular school attended *and whether he or she is there by choice* matter even more."[7]

Critics contend that we lack solid research to confirm the educational accomplishments of schools of choice. Raywid, as well as many at the workshop, disagree. Many studies provide statistics showing that the academic achievement and behavior of students enrolled in schools of choice improve. Unfortunately many of these studies do not compare schools of choice with conventional schools, which makes it hard to separate out choice from other variables that could contribute to school success. Within such limits, however, one can find impressive correlational evidence of the success of individual programs and schools of choice.[8] Some of this evidence is described below.

- In East Harlem, where almost 60 percent of the students fall below the poverty line, less than 15 percent of students read at grade level in 1972, and the district ranked last in reading among New York City's 32 districts. Then East Harlem introduced choice. Today, 64 percent of its students read at or above grade level, and in recent years, the district's ranking has ranged from 20th to 16th in reading. And on State tests administered in 1988, 84 percent of East Harlem's 8th graders were judged competent writers.[9] Secretary Cavazos noted another long-term benefit for the district's children:

  [M]ore important than ranking is how District 4 alumni have fared in entering the city's specialized high schools, which are highly competitive and are regarded as the gateway to career opportunities. In 1973, only 10 District 4 students were accepted; last year the count was 250.

- Studies of magnet schools in New York State, Los Angeles, California, and Montgomery County, Maryland, all found that students' reading and math scores on average were above district and/or national averages.[10] Montclair, New Jersey, reports similar academic gains among students attending schools of choice.

- Students enrolled in Catholic schools outperform their public school counterparts, according to a study by James S. Coleman and his colleagues at the National Opinion Research Center and the University of Chicago. (The same conclusions appear to hold for other schools with a religious foundation and a religiously homogeneous student body.)

  This study, initiated by the U.S. Department of Education, found that the Catholic school advantage is not due to their ability to select students; significantly, the study found that Catholic students do better than public school students when matched for race, socioeconomic status, and parental education. In a May 18, 1989, article in *The Wall Street Journal* summarizing his research, Coleman wrote:

  [S]tudents from Catholic schools are more likely to attend college than are comparable students from either public schools or in-

dependent private schools, and more likely to continue in college without dropping out.

Coleman attributes the advantages to several interrelated factors: Catholic schools make higher academic demands of their students; they have shunned the phenomenon of "course proliferation"; and these schools have been shielded from the effects of the youth revolution, which has diminished the ability of many parents to determine their teenage children's high school curricula and to impose schoolwork requirements.

Coleman and his colleagues conclude that many attributes of Catholic schools—for example, school order and discipline and involved teachers—could also improve the performance of public school students.

- One study reports that vandalism and violence in schools of choice are lower than in conventional schools.[11] Other studies report that student behavior improves substantially in schools of choice[12] and that student suspension rates in New York State's magnet schools are below district averages.[13]

  This last study also reports that student attendance rates were higher in 90 percent of New York's magnet schools than in nonmagnets. And in a national survey, Raywid found that attendance rates of particular students improved over their previous records in 81 percent of the alternative schools polled.[14]

5. Schools of choice can keep potential dropouts in school and draw back those who have already left.

Three years ago, Chris Wilcox from North Branch, Minnesota, was enrolled in a traditional high school, where he was failing four out of seven classes each trimester. He told workshop attendees, " When I should have been home studying or doing homework, I would be hunting, snowmobiling, chasing girls, or whatever. It just wasn't working for me."

Wilcox is now enrolled in an area learning center in Minnesota, which allows him to earn credits for working at a job operating heavy equipment during the day, and to attend classes for academic credit at night. "Without the area learning center, I probably would not graduate," Wilcox said.

The realization that Minnesota needed to accommodate many students like Wilcox was behind the State's decision to approve the High School Graduation Incentives Program, which enables teenage and adult dropouts to return to school. Governor Perpich explained, "We began to publicize the program around the slogan that the students on the verge of dropping out don't need a lecture, they need an alternative." Within the first 6 months of the program, which began in 1987, 1,500 students had signed up.

Student choice programs can provide students like Wilcox with a setting that matches their learning styles and interests. Educators have long known that there is no one best school for every student, and that students are most apt to flourish when they are in an

appropriate educational environment. Research suggests that this truth should be kept in mind in attempting to reduce the dropout rate.

Many studies have found that low achievers make remarkable gains when moved to a new and different school; their academic records, behavior, attendance, and attitude toward school all improve.[15] And a study of dropout patterns in Portland, Oregon, shows that the school a youngster attends has a bigger impact on whether a student drops out than his or her economic background or race.[16] This same analysis found that students attending schools of choice are less apt to drop out than those in other schools.

Empowering Parents

Throughout American history, the success of the Nation's schools has hinged in part on the close ties of parents, teachers, students, and local administrators. Together these four groups once made American public education the envy of the world. But today this relationship has broken down. As Secretary Cavazos lamented in his speech to the Education Press Association, we have "placed our trust in processes and institutions that [have] distanced parents and students from their educational systems."

Programs of choice can help draw parents back into the educational fold. "A free and productive society thrives on empowerment of the people," the Secretary said. "The American economy and our democracy are products of empowerment, and this approach can revitalize schools around the country."

Participants at the White House Workshop on Choice in Education recognize that allowing mothers and fathers to select schools for their children can be a crucial first step to returning American education to its rightful position of prominence. Those in attendance discussed several ways in which schools of choice empower parents.

6. Schools of choice increase parents' freedom.

Choice programs place the decision of which school a child should attend where it rightly belongs—within the family. And in doing so, they allow the close relationship that once existed between parents and schools to be recreated. As President-elect Bush explained at the workshop, choice plans ". . . give parents back their voices—and their proper determining roles—in the makeup of children's education." Wisconsin Governor Thompson agreed:

> *Parents should have a right to decide where their children should go to school. It's as simple as that. Parents are responsible for overseeing their children's education, and they, not State government, not school boards, should decide what influences dominate the prime hours of their children's day.*

Schools of choice have provided freedom for both parents and students who attended the workshop, including 14-year-old Andre Lawrence. Without the choice program, Andre would attend school near his home on the Lower East Side of Manhatten. But the program gives him the freedom to board a subway at 7 a.m. each morning to attend the Jose Feliciano School for the Performing Arts in East Harlem. He notes:

Growing up and attending school on the Lower East Side would have been a challenge. I knew I didn't want to attend my zone junior high school because right across the street drugs were being sold, and I wanted to be out of the neighborhood, and also I wanted to meet new friends.

In order to increase the freedom of parents, however, programs of choice must provide more than cosmetic differences among schools. Sy Fliegel, formerly of East Harlem, notes:

[C]hoice has no real meaning if you don't have quality and diversity to select from. . . . If I have seven blue ties, I don't think it's much different than having one blue tie.

Parents and students must be able to select programs providing different climates, activities, goals, and emphases. However, although schools of choice use different approaches, they must all provide a solid education. Otherwise, Fliegel cautions, "You may have a youngster who will travel for a half hour to go to a different lousy school. That doesn't make sense to me."

Freedom to choose a nonpublic school?

Today, much of the discussion about choice centers on public school choice. However, some proponents of choice believe that real freedom doesn't exist unless parents are allowed to select from nonpublic as well as public schools. At the workshop, this issue prompted lively debate.

Jackie Ducote from the Louisiana Association of Business and Industry argued that restricting choice to public schools hampers reform by failing to change the current bureaucratic structure. She said:

I commend those who are working for public school choice. . . . My only fear is that it may not be any more successful than the reform efforts of the past because the people who have been in charge of the system in the past are still in charge. By limiting the power of parents to choose only among government-operated schools, the bureaucracy will still be in charge, and the parents will still be at their mercy. To be successful, any education reform must have an external force operating that is free from the control of those who are in charge of the present system. That external force is competition. . . . The only way to get true competition is to empower parents to choose among all schools—government-operated, and nongovernment-operated.

Another workshop participant, John E. Coons, professor of law at Berkeley, argues that restricting choice to the public schools insults ordinary families. "If private education is good enough for the rich, why not for the poor?" Coons, the coauthor of *Education by Choice* and *Private Wealth and Public Education*, wrote.[17] Furthermore, he fears that "choice confined to public schools may prove largely cosmetic," since some elite public schools continue to exclude outsiders.

Those who wish to extend freedom of choice to parochial schools included Sister Elizabeth Avalos, a teacher at Mercy High School in

San Francisco, which educates predominately minority students. Sister Avalos explained:

> *[C]hoice is not only choice for academic excellence or choice for a student being able to go to a school because they are at risk educationally . . . but choice is also for those parents who would like a religious education.*

A senior at Mercy High School, Sophia Alvarez, agreed that choice should include parochial as well as public schools:

> *My experience in an all-girls, private Catholic school has been great, and I think other people should have an opportunity to attend these schools because they are excellent. They not only have high academic standards, but they incorporate moral values in them.*

Other workshop participants, however, want choice restricted to public schools. A difficult issue facing choice programs is whether State revenue, which generally follows the student to the school of choice, can be used to allow families to choose among public, private, and parochial schools. Some participants cautioned that First Amendment and other legal concerns, as well political hurdles, may confront those trying to include private or parochial schools in choice programs. For example, the Minnesota Federation of Teachers (MFT) challenged that State's program for allowing students to take nonsectarian courses at private as well as public colleges and universities. The U.S. District Court ruled that the MFT was not the proper party to raise this issue and dismissed the case. The district court's decision is now on appeal to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit.

It is too early to know how this challenge will be resolved, but it is worth noting that in *Mueller* v. *Allen*, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld a Minnesota statute permitting tax deductions for public, private, and parochial school expenses.

Furthermore, political opposition has stalled efforts of many State officials to include nonpublic schools in choice plans. Wisconsin Governor Thompson's first choice proposal would have allowed low-income parents to send their children to any public, private, or parochial school in Milwaukee. It was staunchly opposed by those who argued that such a program would break up the Milwaukee Public Schools. Governor Thompson's new proposal backs off from universal parental choice. In response to a question at the workshop, Governor Thompson said:

> *Why I did not include religious [schools] is that I want to win. . . . I have learned in 22 years in State government that sometimes it's better to take half a loaf and build upon that than try the whole loaf and lose everything.*

Several workshop participants argued that the quality of educational programs is a more important consideration than whether the school is public, private, or parochial. Joyce Duncan, who directs the East Harlem Career Academy, a liberal arts school of choice in District 4, said:

[T]he most important thing is to make sure that parents feel that the schools that they send their children to are doing a quality job. . . . I don't care whether it's a Catholic school; I don't care whether it's a private school; I don't care whether its a public school, as long as it works.

7. Choice plans increase parent satisfaction and involvement in the schools.

People are most inclined to invest themselves in causes and endeavors in which they are committed—ones in which they feel the pride of ownership. When geography instead of choice determines where one's child attends school, parents often fail to support the schools in ways that can help their youngster learn. They are less apt to attend parent–teacher conferences, to volunteer to chaperone field trips, or to contact the school if a problem arises.

Critics charge that schools of choice cannot rely for support on the natural constituency of parents that forms around neighborhood schools. But many workshop participants report otherwise. They say that parents of students in schools of choice are substantially more satisfied and involved than are parents who cannot choose a school. Often the contrast is dramatic.

Research offers several explanations. Donald Erickson, professor of education at the University of California at Los Angeles, speculates that parents who can chose become sensitized to special educational benefits that they might not otherwise notice. Moreover, he writes, "having made a choice, human beings do not like to be proven wrong and hence tend to demonstrate commitment by attempting to ensure that the choice turns out well." Furthermore, Erickson says, "Freedom to choose may generate a sense of power that itself enhances commitment."[18]

The Reverend Gregory Anton McCants, a former president of the East Harlem School Board and the father of three children, believes that schools of choice forced more parents in his community to take an interest in their children's education, and that this helped to boost the district's test scores. But still more important, McCants told conference participants the schools of choice:

. . . provided my youngsters with a chance to enjoy education tailored not only to their needs, but also their interests. It is so nice when young people really want to get up and go to school. It's a wonderful feeling!

Students at the workshop were similarly enthusiastic. Alvarez explained her affection for Mercy High School in San Francisco:

Although attending Mercy was only one of the many decisions I will make in my lifetime, I have no doubt in my mind that the education and values I have acquired at my high school will be a strong foundation for my future success in college and the rest of my life. Mercy not only fulfilled my expectations and those of my parents but it helped me to examine my life, learn about myself.

One reason so many parents report being satisfied with schools of choice is that they are allowed to contribute their advice and ideas. Educators in schools of choice are less apt to assume that they know what is best for students. In districts with some of the most successful schools of choice, parents have initiated the plans. For example, in Eugene, Oregon, parents proposed the new "family alternative school," which will open at the start of the 1989–90 school year. This school was set up to allow parents to be more intimately involved in school practices and policies. A family council does everything from govern the direction of curriculum to participate in the hiring of teachers (although their plans must be consistent with State law, school board policy, and the teachers' contract).

One workshop participant reported that parents who become more involved in their children's schools often become more educated themselves. Joyce Duncan, who directs the East Harlem Career Academy, said:

> *In working in my particular school and within the district with parents, I have seen some transformations—not only in terms of what happens to students in schools of choice, but also what happens to parents. Parents are beginning to take the same skills that we've instilled in their [children], and to apply those skills to their own development. . . . I've witnessed parents in my school return to school, get their high school diploma, go on to college, get a college degree. Some have entered teaching, some have gone on to nursing, others have gone on to business.*

8. Schools of choice can enhance educational opportunities, particularly for disadvantaged parents.

Programs of choice can empower all mothers and fathers. But the potential advantages are particularly dramatic for those who historically have been the most cut off from the schools—parents of low-income youngsters and of whose who speak little if any English.

Critics charge that programs of choice run the risk of creating inequities among schools. They say that schools of choice can drain the most talented students from inner-city schools to more affluent ones, and that this can divert funds from schools most urgently needing them.

Workshop attendees felt otherwise, and so do most low-income Americans. Public opinion polls consistently show that poor Americans support schools of choice. A recent Gallup Poll found that blacks and residents of our largest cities are the most apt to favor them of any demographic group surveyed.

Governor Thompson echoed the sentiments of many workshop participants. He said:

> *Parental choice will provide an equal starting line of opportunity for all of our students, an elevator of opportunity for individuals from the inner city to have the same educational opportunities that your children and my children have.*

Similarly, workshop participant Robert Woodson, Sr., president of the National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise, believes that schools of choice can help the disadvantaged to "overcome the plague of poverty, both in their own minds and their own hearts, and also in the larger society."

Opponents also worry that schools of choice might destroy small, rural districts lacking the resources to provide the range of classes available in large, wealthy districts. However, Minnesota Governor Perpich reports no significant trend favoring either small or large districts, although wealthy districts in Minnesota have gained slightly more students than have poor ones.

Already, magnet schools offering a specialized curriculum have played a major role in rectifying educational inequities. During the past 20 years, magnet schools from Los Angeles to East Harlem have helped to achieve voluntary desegregation while simultaneously providing better educational possibilities for disadvantaged youngsters. Other research shows that school districts using choice to promote desegregation tend to achieve more long-lasting results, while those relying on mandatory assignments suffer from more "white flight."[19]

Magnet schools and other programs of choice can also help to establish more heterogeneous schools. Governor Perpich explained that a good program of choice:

> *. . . adds to the cultural diversity of our schools and exposes students to peers from different backgrounds. If we recognize education is as much about social interaction and adaptability as it is about test tubes and textbooks, then this exposure better prepares our students for life in the melting pot of our society and for careers in our global economy.*

Some participants warned, however, that creating schools of choice does not automatically lead to more equitable schools. The gap between fortunate and less fortunate students may widen in a district with both magnet and nonmagnet schools. Charles Glenn, Jr., from the Office of Educational Equity in Massachusetts reported:

> *Nonmagnet schools, as in Boston, have no real incentive or invitation to be distinctive or to satisfy parents. Parents are simply assigned. It's like the U.S. Post Office. You just open the doors and let the kids come. That's why we in the Massachusetts Department of Education have been encouraging school systems to move toward making every school a school of choice. Cambridge, Lowell, Fall River, Lawrence have done so. Boston is working on doing that.*

And a recent study by the Chicago-based group Designs for Change found that selective magnet schools in four urban districts serve far more middle class and high-achieving students than poor youngsters. But it must be kept in mind that many of these schools were designed primarily to prevent white flight; therefore it is not surprising that they fail to meet the needs of the disadvantaged. The report concludes:

> *In these school systems, school choice has, by and large, become a new improved method of student sorting, in which*

schools pick and choose among students. In this sorting process, black and Hispanic students, low-income students, students with low achievement, students with absence and behavior problems, handicapped students, and limited-English-proficient students have very limited opportunities to participate in popular options high schools and programs.[20]

Overseeing choice programs

Workshop participants were of two minds as to whether schools of choice must be carefully regulated to improve educational opportunities for the disadvantaged. Joe Nathan from the Hubert Humphey Institute of Public Affairs in Minnesota argued that it is insufficient to create the schools without also developing policies to assure that they work. He said, "[S]imply basing improvement strategies on competition . . . will not solve all the problems, particularly for low- and moderate-income people."

He and other workshop participants urge districts to oversee carefully the following aspects of choice programs:

- ***Parent information***. Opponents of schools of choice sometimes argue that disadvantaged parents are unable to make sound educational decisions on behalf of their children. Proponents disagree. Parent choice is most apt to succeed if all parents have sufficient information. But special efforts should be made to provide information to at-risk families, since they often have less experience with bureaucracies, may be intimidated by the schools, or may have limited English skills. "It's ironic that we have more information in this country right now about how to select among cars and refrigerators than we have about how to select among schools," Nathan wrote in an article on choice that elaborates on comments he made at the workshop.[21] Some school districts, including Cambridge, Massachusetts, consider their parent information centers to be key elements of their choice plans.

- ***Student assignments***. Assignment policies must be fair, widely understood, and legally sound. Because desegregation must be considered in assigning students to schools, unlimited choice generally cannot be provided in metropolitan areas. Most educators advise against policies favoring those with a sophisticated knowledge of the school system, or with special influence. They also suggest that the schools avoid first-come, first-served policies, which can be chaotic and tend to favor the most informed and aggressive parents. And they advise that districts prohibit admissions on the basis of students' past academic achievement or behavior.

- ***Transportation***. States and districts must give careful thought to this matter, since low-income parents are less able to transport their children to school at their own expense. "If transportation is not made available, opportunities for [low-income] youngsters will not truly expand," Nathan notes.[22] Most districts with choice programs pay to transport children to whatever school they select within their own district. However, in Minnesota and other States, students crossing district lines must make their own arrangements

to get to the border of the district housing their new school, at which point the receiving school district provides transportation. Low-income parents receive some financial compensation from the State for transporting their children to the district boundary.

In contrast to Nathan, some policymakers and educators fear that too much regulation deprives low-income parents of the ability to make important decisions for themselves. At the workshop, Robert Woodson of the National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise said that society often assumes that low-income people are incapable of helping themselves. For this reason, professionals are paid to act on their behalf and to regulate their lives. Woodson argues, however, that the disadvantaged possess the skills and entrepreneurial talents to help themselves—and that this includes the ability to decide matters pertaining to the education of their children. He cited the many independent neighborhood schools that have been started by disaffected public school teachers and low-income parents. In many communities, these schools have enabled students once viewed as uneducable to succeed.

Conclusion

"Ten years from now, people will be surprised that there ever was vigorous debate about public school choice," Nathan predicated in a recent newspaper column.[23] "It will be an accepted right, like voting, equal pay for equal work, and nondiscriminatory housing."

Public acceptance for schools of choice is steadily growing. Although many view choice as critical to the improvement of American schools, skeptics still remain. William Bulger, president of the Massachusetts State Senate and moderator of a workshop panel, notes:

> *It's my experience and my observation that every person favors choice. A hundred percent favor choice for themselves. The problem for people who want to institute and broaden and enhance choice is that group of people who favor choice for themselves but oppose it for all the rest.*

Opposition is the most pronounced among educators. "There is a puzzling resistance among educators to the extension of parent choice," Glenn notes.[24] He attributes this partly to educators' fears that their jobs will be threatened, and to concerns that teachers and principals would be under new and overwhelming pressures.

Those who have created schools of choice warn that the task involves hard work and ample fortitude. Most of this work must be accomplished at the grassroots level. Secretary Cavazos told the audience:

> *[I]t is you who will ultimately convince the Nation—school by school, district by district, State by State—that the principle of choice must play an important part in the solution to our formidable educational problems.*

The White House Workshop on Choice in Education was designed to serve as a source of information to those just beginning this endeavor. Organizers of the workshop also hope the gathering will serve as a catalyst for change. Lamar Alexander, president of the University of Tennessee and former governor of Tennessee, explained:

> *The fact that so many people have come together . . . shows that this movement is kind of beyond all of us. It's bigger than all of us. It will keep on going after us, but perhaps we can do something to nourish it, and that's what we're all here for today.*

The benefits of choice are too numerous to delay action. President-elect Bush emphasized:

> *The evidence is striking and abundant. Almost without exception, wherever choice has been attempted—Minnesota, East Harlem, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and a hundred other places in between—choice has worked. . . . Bad schools get better. Good ones get better still, and entire school systems have been restored to public confidence by the implementation of these choice plans. Disaffected families have been brought from*

private schools back into public education. Any school reform that can boast such success deserves our attention, our emphases, and our effort.

Footnotes

1. When the workshop was held on January 10, 1989, George Bush was Vice President and the President-elect; Ronald Reagan was about to complete his term as President.

2. Blakemore, Bill, (January 10, 1989). ABC World News Tonight.

3. Fliegel, Sy (March 23 1987). Interviewed by John Merrow, education correspondent, MacNeil/Lehrer News Hour.

4. Peterkin, Robert, and Jones, Dorothy, (1989). "Schools of Choice in Cambridge, Massachusetts," in *Public Schools by Choice: Expanding Opportunities for Parents, Students, and Teachers, edited by Joe Nathan. St. Paul, Minnesota: The Institute for Learning.*

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6. Nathan, Joe, Editor (1989). *Public Schools by Choice: Expanding Opportunities for Parents, Students, and Teachers.* St. Paul, Minnesota: The Institute for Learning.

7. Raywid, Mary Anne (1989). "The Mounting Case for Schools of Choice," in *Public Schools by Choice*, 13.

8. Many of the studies mentioned in this report are cited in "The Mounting Case for Schools of Choice" by Raywid. A special thanks to her for calling them to the attention of the U.S. Department of Education.

9. Information supplied by Deputy Superintendent Juana Dainis, Community School District 4, July 18, 1989, interview.

10. Magi Educational Services (January 1985). *New York State Magnet School Research Study.* Albany: State Education Department.

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16. Sexton, Porter (Summer 1985). "Trying to Make It Real Compared to What? Implications of High School Dropout Statistics." *Journal of Educational Equity and Leadership, 5(2), 92–106.*

17. Coons, John E. (January 2, 1989). "Don't Limit 'Choice' to Public Schools Only." *Los Angeles Times.* See also Coons, John E., and Sugarman, Stephen D. (1978). *Education by Choice: The Case for Family Control.* Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press.

18. Erickson, Donald A. (1982). "Disturbing Evidence about the 'One Best System.'" *The Public School Monopoly,* edited by Robert B. Everhard. San Francisco: Pacific Institute for Public Policy Research and Cambridge: Ballinger, 393–422.

19. Rossell, Christine H. (March 1987). "The Carrot or the Stick in School Desegregation Policy?" ERIC ED279781. Rossell, Christine H., and Hawley, Willis D. (1983). *The Consequences of School Desegregation.* Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Temple University Press.

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21. Nathan, Joe (June 1987). "Results and Future Prospects of State Efforts to Increase Choice Among Schools." *Phi Delta Kappan,* 67–73.

22. Ibid.

23. Nathan, Joe (April 5, 1989). Column in *The Christian Science Monitor.*

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REMARKS BY

PRESIDENT RONALD REAGAN

January 10, 1989

We're here to talk about a remarkable advance in American education—an idea whose time has come. Or it might be better to say, whose time has come again. For when we talk about choice in public education, what we mean first and foremost is parental choice. We're talking about reasserting the right of American parents to play a vital—perhaps the central—part in designing the kind of education they believe their children need.

I don't need to rehearse the litany and cite the evidence to this audience. We've been talking about these matters for eight years now, and the evidence is overwhelming. Choice works, and it works with a vengeance. Whether it's a Harlem school district in which scores have risen dramatically because parents are now permitted to choose which school to send their children to, or the marvelous program in Minnesota that is fostering unprecedented competition among public schools to make them more attractive to parents and students, choice is the most exciting thing that's going on in America today.

Choice represents a return to some of our most basic notions about education. In particular, programs emphasizing choice reflect the simple truth that the keys to educational success are schools and teachers that teach and parents who insist that their children learn. They must work in concert, respecting each other's particular concerns and needs, not second-guessing each other.

And choice in education is the wave of the future because it represents a return to some of our most basic American values. Choice in education is no mere abstraction. Like its economic cousin, free enterprise, and its political cousin, democracy, it affords hope and opportunity. Can anyone doubt that, after hearing these splendid young people testify about how choice has changed their lives?

Choice recognizes the principle that there is no one best way for all of us. It allows schools to excel at something special, rather than trying—and failing—to be all things to all people.

Education was one of the means by which this country first grew great and strong and powerful—through the extraordinary efforts of ordinary Americans to better themselves and make a better life for their families and their children. The key step in the most important domestic effort of this century—the civil rights movement—was the 1954 Brown decision by the Supreme Court and that, of course, was about affording black children equal access to public schools.

We all know how significant that was because we all understand that without appropriate education it's nearly impossible for the disadvantaged to improve themselves.

All Americans can consider the particular triumph of those who have immigrated to our shores from scores of lands, scores of cultures, speaking a hundred different tongues.

The struggle to make their way in a country whose language they didn't speak was a hard one, and almost every sociological study of American immigrants tells the same story—those that did best economically are those whose passion for education drove them and their children, and that meant paying attention. It meant making sure homework was done, report cards were signed, and that their children were always challenged and never bored. In this way, they knew, their children would make it as Americans.

For too long, I think, we were content as Americans to imagine that our Nation and our society were so inherently strong and successful that they could continue to run on automatic pilot. The schools had done well and should continue to do well. We could turn our attention elsewhere.

Well, if we were on automatic pilot in the past, we've learned we have to work the controls by ourselves every day. And that's why choice in education is so important. Parents are at the controls.

At the same time, teachers know that their students are going home to parents who'll serve as their partners in getting the homework done and keeping the excitement and enthusiasm up. Students won't be marking time in school; instead, they'll be preparing for an American future in which literacy and technological skill will be more vital to their chances for prosperity than ever before. Engaged parents and engaged teachers mean engaged students and a better educated America.

Now you'll be hearing from some other folks, including especially a good friend of mine—whose name happens to be George Bush. So I'll get off here and I want to thank all of you for all that you're doing. God bless all of you.

REMARKS BY

PRESIDENT-ELECT GEORGE BUSH

January 10, 1989

I'm delighted to be here, and I appreciate your participating in this workshop. You've been discussing an urgently felt need in American public education: greater choice for our families about which schools their children will attend. I don't want to return to territory that others here today have covered already. But I would like to say a few personal words about the subject of your workshop—and about its larger meaning to American education's progress in the years to come.

It will be six years ago this April that President Reagan's National Commission on Excellence in Education released its landmark report, *A Nation at Risk*. That study shocked us to attention, giving voice to a growing public sense of alarm about the quality of our schools, and giving sharp focus to a vigorous grassroots movement for education reform.

That movement—as far as it's gone—has been a success. We've learned much that is new about what makes a good school—and much else that we had, unfortunately, forgotten. As a Nation, we've spent well on education, as we should. We have raised teacher salaries and per pupil expenditures. We have financed myriad reports and experiments. And we have identified what works in our schools—and then, too, what doesn't.

We're better off for our efforts; that much is beyond dispute. Our children are learning better. But at the same time, it's quite clear how far we have left to go. And the bottom line, I think, is this: that the work and rewards of the first wave of necessary American education reform are now largely behind us.

From hard-won experience and common sense, the principles and policies that must drive continued school improvements have emerged in clearest possible outline. And now it's time we acted on them in earnest. It's time for a second great wave of education reform—not helter-skelter, not here and there, but everywhere: in every State, in every district, for every school and every student in America. Those good and tested reform ideas of recent years must become universal—universally understood and applied, and thus universally enjoyed by our children.

Certainly among the most promising of these ideas—perhaps the single most promising of these ideas—is choice. It responds to a simple but quite serious problem. In most places around the country, as you know, students are arbitrarily assigned by their school systems to a single public school. If that school is a bad one, its students are trapped. Their parents have no chance to shift them to another public school—maybe just a few city blocks away—that has better teaching or better discipline or just plain higher quality overall.

It's a system of self-perpetuating mediocrity: poor schools have no incentive to improve; their students are captive clients, and parents have no opportunity to take their business elsewhere.

Choice plans that are intelligently conceived, implemented, and monitored—plans like magnet schools, open enrollment programs, and other innovative mechanisms—restore that opportunity to our families. They give parents back their voices—and their proper determining roles—in the makeup of children's education. They give schools a chance to distinguish themselves from one another, and a chance to compete for and earn the loyalty of the students and families they serve. And choice plans work.

This is more than idle theory, as I hardly need remind this audience. The evidence is striking and abundant. Almost without exception, wherever choice has been attempted—Minnesota, East Harlem, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and a hundred other places in between—choice has worked.

Daily student attendance rates go up. High school dropout rates go down. School disciplinary problems decrease. Teacher morale improves. And children learn—their test scores are higher, and their interest in learning is engaged. Bad schools get better, and good ones get better still, and entire school systems have been restored to public confidence by the implementation of these choice plans—and disaffected families have been brought from private schools back into public education.

Any school reform that can boast such success deserves our attention, our emphases, and our effort. Education is important for its own sake, of course, and better education is always a worthy goal. But Americans believe—Americans know—something else about education, too. We know about the social and economic advantages it confers. We know that education is a key to success in adult life, and we know that it is one of the surest paths out of poverty.

Two centuries of experience with immigration justify this faith. And all that we understand about contemporary poverty and disadvantage confirm it. For young black and Hispanic Americans, as well as whites, completing the last two years of high school reduces by about 60 percent the likelihood of adult poverty. More than 90 percent of all Americans with high school diplomas have family incomes greater than twice the official poverty rate.

For 35 years now, equal access to public education has been the law of this land. We've done well by our commitment to keep schoolhouse doors open to all. But what happens inside those doors must command our attention, as well.

Quality education has become a central civil rights question of our time. Too often today it is our disadvantaged children who are most likely to be burdened by inadequate public education. And so it is working poor and low-income families who suffer most from the absence of choice in the public schools.

For this reason alone—for the benefit of empowerment it promises to our disadvantaged citizens—further expansion of public school choice is a national imperative. It's a widely popular idea, as you know, and it enjoys unusual bipartisan support. But it will take work—educational improvements always do. Working educators' concerns about the consequences of choice must be heard, acknowledged, and met. And

other reforms are going to be necessary to make choice meaningful. Greater autonomy and authority for teachers and principals, for example, along with better publicized and more reliable measurements of school performance.

I want to help. Let's be clear about what I meant during the campaign when I said I intended to be the "education president." I'm not one of those who believes that all American wisdom and initiative reside inside the Beltway. It doesn't. Our past few years' experience with education reform is proof of that. It's been a national movement of local and State movements—as it must continue to be. It draws its ultimate energy and genius from those who have the strongest, sharpest, and truest concern for our children: their parents. That's one reason why public school choice—parental choice—is such an exciting and inspiring idea.

We in Washington should do nothing to loosen the necessary connection between families and schools. Indeed, we should do everything in our considerable power to strengthen it. That speaks for a broader Federal role in education than might immediately be apparent.

I intend to provide every feasible assistance—financial and otherwise—to States and districts interested in further experiments with choice plans or other valuable reforms. I will ask the Department of Education to monitor and focus continued attention on the need for future progress and success. And I will be spokesman and advocate for further public school improvement.

It's up to all of us together. The stakes are very high. And we simply cannot afford to fail.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you again for your kind attention this afternoon. I ask for your continued attention to something vital to our future as a Nation—the next wave of education reform in America. And may God bless you all.

REMARKS BY

U.S. SECRETARY OF EDUCATION LAURO F. CAVAZOS

January 10, 1989

It's an honor to join with the President in welcoming you to this important conference on freedom of choice in education.

If we examine the history of American education there is consensus on certain fundamental lessons and values. First, that all students should learn English, reading, and mathematics, and that they think and be analytical. Further, that students understand the role of a person in a moral society. Another concept has been knowledge of the nature of our society, the history of our Nation and the world and fundamentals of the natural sciences. Thus developed the concept of a truly educated person and the American system of education.

We evolved into a system of local governments taking over the responsibility of hiring teachers and prescribing what should be taught and where students should attend schools.

As the school system evolved, concern was raised about the quality of instruction and the objectives of the curriculum. Today, we are in full-scale debate on these matters. Another issue that has moved into national focus is freedom of choice—in other words, how much choice parents have in the school that their child will attend. This issue, I submit, is related to the question of quality of education. Further, it becomes a key factor in what our school systems will look like in the future. It is clear that if we are to address the ills of education and enhance the fine programs that exist in our elementary and secondary schools, Americans must restructure the school system. Choice is one of the strategies that addresses restructuring.

In making such a generalization, I am not merely commending freedom of choice in the abstract. I am also aware that some of the most encouraging signs in the educational community have come from States and localities that have permitted parents and children to choose the school they believe will best serve their needs.

Magnet schools, for example, have been so successful that few people now oppose them, though at one time the opposition was formidable. Many former critics have been won over by the measurable improvement in students attending such schools.

When Montclair, New Jersey, started its magnet program approximately 10 years ago, the scores of 7th and 8th graders on basic skills tests were discouraging: in the 40th and 45th percentiles. Today the scores have virtually doubled: to the 92nd and 95th percentiles.

In 1976, Buffalo, New York, had the highest proportion of students requiring remedial programs among the State's five largest cities. After approximately 10 years of a magnet schools program, Buffalo had the lowest percentage, despite the fact that the city was next to last on the poverty scale.

Perhaps the most dramatic example of a successful magnet program is to be found in District 4 of East Harlem, one of New York City's most depressed areas. The program was introduced in the early 1970s, when fewer than 15 percent of the students in the district were reading at their own grade level. As a matter of fact, District 4 ranked at the bottom of the city's 32 districts in reading. Today, 64 percent of its students are reading at their own grade level, and the district now ranks 16 out of 32. But more important than ranking is how District 4 alumni have fared in entering the city's specialized high schools, which are highly competitive and are regarded as the gateways to career opportunities. In 1973, only 10 District 4 students were accepted; last year the count was 250.

These examples are familiar to most of you. But what is particularly impressive about the New York programs is the degree to which they have improved the performance of precisely those students who are most at-risk in our society—those who are disadvantaged and living in inner cities. Nothing is more important today than the future of such children, for whom we have thus far done too little. And if this application of the principle of choice can show such results, then we must make certain that other applications are at least considered.

After all, in the past 20 years magnet schools have become a substantial chapter in the history of contemporary education. They are no longer considered pioneer experiments, and indeed they have been commended by a growing number of professionals. In Los Angeles, for example, a majority of magnet teachers have recommended an expansion of the program because they say it has improved self-esteem, academic achievement, and post-high school opportunities among students. Likewise, a survey of New York teachers in magnet schools revealed that 96 percent support the program in that State.

This observation brings me back to the idea of a consensus in society about what kind of schools we should have. For many years we have been arguing over a number of education issues, but I would suggest that we are moving towards a new consensus on choice, at least where magnet schools are concerned. We have by no means reached the point where everyone agrees that these programs are a good thing, but I would say that we are almost there, that even the most vocal opponents have accepted the permanence of those magnet schools already in place and expect expansion throughout the Nation.

It is instructive, I believe, to see how this consensus is taking shape. Magnet schools were developed in response to local needs, and while the federal government has sometimes funded such programs—particularly when they were a part of desegregation plans—their success has usually been the result of heroic efforts by local advocates of choice, who have planned well, sold their idea to the community and then worked to make the abstract concept a concrete reality. This has happened not once but time and time again in all parts of the country, where people with the same frontier spirit have worked virtually independently of one another to achieve the same ends.

The U.S. government has played a role in promoting these programs. We have provided funds for local and State studies. We have researched and evaluated key programs. We have sponsored conferences such as this one, and we have made certain that the positive results achieved by schools of choice have been published throughout the Nation, so that every professional educator and every school board has at least potential access to such information. I can assure you that in the coming years we will continue to do all of these things in support of sound and innovative choice programs. We believe in the principle. We recommend the practice.

But those of us at the federal level can't really claim credit for the increasing popularity of magnet schools—and herein lies a lesson for us all. Public education in America is still in the hands of those closest to the people: the educators in the States, the counties, and the municipalities and that is the way it should be.

It is there that the battle for schools of choice is being fought and won. Many of you here today have been instrumental in bringing about greatest choice in your communities, and it is to you and others like you that the real credit belongs.

Likewise, it is you who will ultimately convince the Nation—school by school, district by district, State by State—that the principle of choice must play an important part in the solution to our formidable educational problems. Our federal system of government, with its checks and balances and division of responsibilities, still survives intact in the structure of our educational system. That is why I believe educational reform, with its inevitable emphasis on choice, will ultimately work—because it is succeeding at the level where decisions are best made—at the grassroots level. I have confidence in the people of this country and in their continued commitment to the frontier values that produced that earlier consensus: hard work, perseverance, and freedom of choice.

And if we are to build a new consensus in American education, one based on these traditional virtues, we must build it the way we did the first one—from the ground up. Magnet schools are already becoming an accepted part of our educational system, because they have been tested and proven at the local level. It is inevitable and desirable that other choice programs be tried on the frontiers of education, to see if they too can be incorporated into this new consensus. And such programs are already being implemented.

In Cambridge, Massachusetts, parents are allowed to choose their children's elementary school. Superintendent Robert Peterkin reports that those schools whose enrollment falls below a minimal level will be asked to reexamine their priorities and to make constructive changes. If they fail to do so, then the district will step in and replace key administrators. If that stratagem fails, then the school will be closed. So far, the public response has been highly positive. And the district's performance has improved significantly.

Last year Iowa's legislature enacted a law that gave students the option of choosing schools in neighboring districts where programs were offered that were unavailable in their own district. This kind of choice may pose some problems in bookkeeping, but it clearly offers new and exciting opportunities to students in the State of Iowa.

Minnesota has recently adopted the most far-reaching of all choice programs. The available options include one that will allow high school juniors and seniors to attend any public or private college in Minnesota, with tuition, books, and fees paid by the State. Starting in the fall of 1990, Minnesotans will implement a law that allows elementary and secondary students to attend any public school in their State, provided the receiving district agrees to participate in the program.

These innovative choice programs, which are now being tested in the educational marketplace, may in 10 years be abandoned or else become an integral part of the new consensus, and those of us who believe in the principle of choice must make sure that they get a fair hearing. By "fair hearing" I mean that their strengths should be made known to the general public, and also that their critics be heard and answered with reason and good faith. We must try to enlist the entire educational community in supporting the best choice programs.

The 1987 Gallup Poll on education reported that 71 percent of those surveyed believed that parents "should have the right to choose the local schools their children attend." Good. That's a healthy majority. But a majority and a consensus are two different things. I am worried about that other 29 percent. Why are they opposed to choice? Do they have a genuine philosophical quarrel with the principle, or do they simply need more information? We must find out and try to reconcile them with the majority.

I am optimistic about the future of American education. I think we can solve the problems we now face, however formidable they seem. I think we can build a new consensus and in so doing restore to our people a greater measure of choice than recent generations can remember. More importantly, I think we can do all these things and thus will result a kinder and gentler Nation. Together we must try.

REMARKS BY

MINNESOTA GOVERNOR RUDY PERPICH

January 10, 1989

It is a privilege and honor to be here to talk about choice in education, not only in Minnesota, but across the country.

Let me begin on a personal note. I first became interested in choice about 20 years ago as a member of the Minnesota State Senate. I moved down from my home town in northern Minnesota, and Lola and I weren't paying attention to the schools because we felt that in Minnesota all the schools were very good schools. In about two or three weeks it became apparent that wasn't true.

I talked to the school administrator and said I would like to move the children to another school. He said, "No, that's the way it is. This is where you live and this is where your children will attend school." I then realized that one of the most important steps we can take to improve academic skills and attitudes of our children is to expand the ability of families to choose among our public schools.

It wasn't until about 20 years later, in 1985, that I first formally proposed these reforms in Minnesota. We had a coalition of supporters that included the PTA, a business group known as the Minnesota Business Partnership, the League of Women Voters, the Citizens League, and a group of educators known as the People for Better Schools. Despite this support, it was still very difficult to get people to accept choice. Inside and outside the educational community, they believed that choice would produce bureaucratic chaos and educational inequities.

So what we did was enact the reforms piece by piece so that the public could really gain confidence in the ability of choice to broaden both the level of participation and the level of excellence of our schools.

We began with a program passed in 1985 that made Minnesota the first State where high school juniors and seniors could take postsecondary classes at State expense, even if they were not among the top students in their class. The students are eligible to earn high school and college credits simultaneously. State education aid follows the students wherever they attend school. This promotes increased educational quality and accountability through market competition.

The program was an immediate success. An early survey of the participants showed that 95 percent were satisfied, and parents said their children studied harder for the postsecondary courses than they did for high school courses. Six percent of the participants in this program were literally dropouts that came back.

This year more than 5,400 juniors and seniors are participating in the program. Overall, they are doing as well if not better at the postsecondary level as members of the freshman class. Some of them are the first in their families ever to attend college, and for them it is a dream come true and a source of great pride.

But the most encouraging response has come from the high schools. We have had a quadrupling of advanced placement courses in the last two years, and we've had a doubling of international languages, world languages, over the past four years, and many of the schools have developed partnerships with postsecondary institutions. The community colleges now in many of our high schools are offering courses.

The point is by expanding choices and opportunities for students, we have improved the overall quality of the system so that students benefit regardless of whether or not they exercise the choice options. It is very, very apparent that that is happening.

It is important that these alternatives exist as much for students who are struggling as for students who are successful, and this is the guiding philosophy behind our second Access to Excellence reform, which was passed in 1987. It enables dropouts and students who are at risk of dropping out to choose among a variety of educational alternatives, including area learning centers, college courses, and classes in other school districts. Fifteen hundred students signed up for this graduation incentives program within the first six months that it was offered, and half of them were dropouts coming back to school to earn their diplomas.

We began to publicize the program around the slogan that the students on the verge of dropping out don't need a lecture, they need an alternative. We advertised the program in the media and on grocery bags in the stores.

Last year we broadened this program to include adult dropouts over the age of 21 and enabled nonpublic schools to establish contracts to help educate these adult students.

The message is that it is never too early or too late to learn in Minnesota. I will now recommend to the legislature that the student that's a dropout or at risk of dropping out as defined by statute has a right to go to either a public or a nonpublic school.

The third and most controversial Access to Excellence reform is open enrollment, the simple but profound idea that students can sit down at the kitchen table with their parents and decide what type of curriculum best fits their needs. In '85, when it was recommended to the legislature, it didn't pass. In '86 we wrote what we considered were one-third of the total school districts we have in Minnesota and said to them, "You are the best that there is. What are you afraid of? Why don't you give your students that opportunity to go to any school that they want?"

We passed a voluntary open enrollment bill in 1987 and again State revenues follow the students to wherever they go to school. The public school students are eligible to move to another school district if they choose, which prompted predictions of mass migrations and bureaucratic nightmares. But our experience with open enrollment has been very smooth thus far.

As we expected, it takes a very, very compelling reason for a student to leave the home school to go to another district, and relatively few have

done so. In the first year, a little over 100 transferred to another district. This year a little over 400 students have transferred, and next year we expect a little over 1,000 will be transferring. That is out of 525,000 who are eligible.

Of those who have moved, there is no significant trend to larger or smaller districts. It is almost 50/50, with only a slight trend toward more wealthy districts. As we hoped, the primary impact of open enrollment has not been between school districts. It has been within the district.

Further, what movement does exist adds to the cultural diversity of our schools and exposes students to peers from different backgrounds. If we recognize education is as much about social interaction and adaptability as it is about test tubes and textbooks, then this exposure better prepares our students for life in the melting pot of our society and for careers in our global economy.

For the same reason, open enrollment cannot interfere with existing desegregation programs in Minnesota. They are also primarily restricted to the public schools, although as I said I am proposing nonpublic school involvement for students who have dropped out or are at risk of dropping out.

In any case, gradual exposure to choice programs has built public confidence in their effectiveness. When we first proposed Access to Excellence in 1985, two-thirds of the public was opposed to choice. Today, over 60 percent of the people in Minnesota favor choice.

Because of that support, I am proud to say that in 1988 we enacted a comprehensive open enrollment policy. By 1990 all of our public school students will be eligible to move, provided it does not interfere with desegregation.

Over time teachers have also become more supportive of choice. Because the schools have become more responsive, their role in education becomes more active.

Choice has also helped Minnesota maintain its ranking for the best high school completion rate in the Nation; we have a 91.4 percent completion rate.

What makes our choice programs unique is their ability to help all students. This happens in two ways. First, choice creates market competition between schools and compels them to be more responsive and flexible to students' needs.

Second, choice allows students to find the type of educational setting and community that best suits their personalities and learning needs. There are many students in the Nation . . . who simply need a change of scenery, a community of people that better suits their needs. Where students find their niche, and where they find a school in which they feel at home, the evidence is showing that they thrive.

I singled out a student in my State address this week. She was a very bright student who was frustrated with her teachers and the learning atmosphere in her school. Two years ago, she was ranked in the lower third of her class and had announced to her parents that she was

quitting school at the age of 16 to become a drummer in a rock band. But her mother read the ad about our Postsecondary Options Program and encouraged her to try it. As a result, she discovered the joy and the power of learning. Last June, this student, Stacy Condon, simultaneously graduated from high school and completed her first year of college with a full 4.5 credits and a high B average.

We recognize that what works in Minnesota will not automatically work everywhere in the country, and as the 1988–89 chair of the Educational Commission of the States I have stressed choice as a general philosophy without suggesting any rigid models.

As ECS chair I have asked every State to examine its education system to determine how to encourage more involvement and choices among parents and students. Behind that request is my belief that your educational reforms must be accomplished at the State and local level. At the same time I am very pleased by the interest that is shown by the White House regarding choice in education and believe that the federal government can play a role without interfering with State efforts.

I really and truly believe that choice can make a huge difference to many of our children and help prepare us for the global economy of the 21st century.

REMARKS BY

WISCONSIN GOVERNOR TOMMY G. THOMPSON

January 10, 1989

It is indeed a pleasure to be here and to have this opportunity to talk about a concept that I believe is absolutely essential in improving public education—parental choice.

One of the most important responsibilities of State government is to provide for the education of our children. A State's public education system is vital to its health. We have made tremendous strides in improving Wisconsin's economic picture. But what good, ladies and gentlemen, is a strong economy and plenty of jobs if our workers lack the skills necessary to fill them?

What kind of a future can we plan for our Nation if our children are not prepared to lead it? I had the opportunity to be in a seminar a couple of weeks ago in which a futurist got up and spoke about the fact that by 1994, 20 percent of the jobs that will be created by '94 have not even been thought of today. In order for us to adapt, in order for us to innovate, we're going to have to improve our educational quality.

I do not want to paint a dismal picture, for many States have many excellent public school systems, and in Wisconsin, we've always taken the education of our children very seriously, and we are very proud of our results.

While our public school system is one of the best in the Nation, we must continue to build upon our success. "Keeping up" is no longer good enough. You see, we in Wisconsin set high standards for ourselves. We want our schools to be leaders both nationally and internationally.

Looking at this from an economic standpoint, we now compete in a global marketplace. In turn, our students, our educational systems, can no longer compete only with students in the United States. They must be able to compete with students throughout the world.

We've seen two decades of educational reforms—everything from open classrooms to new math. Can anyone in this room remember all the fads and all of the reforms that have taken place in education in the last 10 years? In most cases, for all of us, the ideas and efforts did improve, to a certain degree, but somehow there still remains a lot to be accomplished.

If nothing else, 20 years of experimenting pointed to one thing—that there is a need for a comprehensive and dramatic change. I am convinced that our public school system must be monitored to adapt to society's needs and changes in technology. I am also convinced that introducing parental and student involvement and choice into our public school systems is a reform that will have a lasting impact on public education.

Parental choice will continue our growth towards educational excellence in our respective States and in the country. In my first two

years in office, I've earned the reputation of being a probusiness governor. That's a reputation that I'm very proud of. You see, I'm a great believer in our free enterprise system. I believe that people make the best decisions when left to themselves and when they are free of government limitations on their choices.

I believe competition is good. It pushes each of us to work harder, to stay ahead of the crowd.

For many of the reasons that I strongly support our free enterprise system, I am also a strong supporter of parental choice. Like our free enterprise system, choice in education expands options available to parents as well as students, and removes government limitations on their choices. Competition breeds accountability. Under the concept of parental choice, schools will be held accountable for their students' performance.

Schools providing a high quality education would flourish, the same way as a business that improves its quality for its consumers. Schools failing to meet the needs of their students would not be able to compete, and in effect would go out of business.

Since the breakup of AT&T, Americans are now choosing their phone service, yet American parents, if they decide to send their children to public schools, cannot choose what school their children will attend. I say it's time for a little competition in our public school systems, and I am confident that competition will produce improvement in our education system.

There are other compelling reasons for implementing a parental choice program. Parental choice would give low income children the same advantages as other children. The studies support this. Why shouldn't low-income children have the same choice and the same opportunities as individuals who come from wealthy families? Not every parent can afford to buy a house in the neighborhood where the best schools are located, or send their child to a private school. Currently it's mainly the wealthy who have the ability to practice parental choice.

Parental choice will provide an equal starting line of opportunity for all of our students; an elevator of opportunity for individuals from the inner city to have the same educational opportunities that your children and my children have. The concept of parental choice recognizes that children are not all the same. They have individual talents and specialized needs. [In schools of choice] children will no longer be assigned to schools as if they were all the same. Schools could design curricula to meet specialized needs.

Not only would students and parents benefit from a parental choice program; teachers would have a stake, would become more readily recognized as true professionals. Teachers would have a greater stake in the school's performance as well as the school's success. These are all the sound reasons for implementing a parental choice program.

But there is one reason more important than all of the above—parents. Parents should have a right to decide where their children should go to school. It's as simple as that. Parents are responsible for overseeing their children's education, and they, not

State government, not school boards, should decide what influences dominate the prime hours of their children's day. Wisconsin residents overwhelmingly believe that parents should have this right.

A study conducted last year by the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute, which is headed by Michael Joyce, found that three-fourths—three-fourths of Wisconsin residents believe parents should have the right to choose the school their children attend. Seventy percent feel that parents whose children attend public school should have the choice to be able to send their child to a public school in a nearby district if they so desire. The study results in Milwaukee, our largest, most scrutinized and yet our most criticized public school district, were even more noteworthy.

Eighty-one percent of the Milwaukee residents believe parents should have the opportunity to choose the public school their child attends. Eighty-two percent said parents should be able to send their child to another school district.

Last year, I included a provision in my budget to improve the educational system in Milwaukee and give parents more choice. For a variety of reasons, many parents in Milwaukee's inner city do not have the opportunities. My proposal was intended to remove financial barriers for many parents.

I have proposed a program which would have allowed low-income parents to send their children to any public, any private, or any parochial school in Milwaukee County. The plan was endorsed statewide by parents, minority community leaders, and many educators. But despite that support, we ran into some very powerful opposition. The opponents argued that we were trying to break up the Milwaukee public schools. That certainly was not our objective.

Rather, it was to widen the educational opportunities for low- income students, and improve overall the quality of their education. As many of you probably know, the legislation unfortunately went nowhere.

Last year's outcome, however, has not dissuaded us. When I unveil my budget at the end of this month, it will include a two-pronged approach to increasing parental choice in Wisconsin's public education system.

The proposal allows low-income children enrolled in kindergarten through 6th grade, in Milwaukee public schools, to attend any public or nonsectarian private school in Milwaukee County. The second part of the plan extends the concept of parental choice to the rest of the State. This provision, which is fashioned after the successful program in place in Minnesota, would allow a pupil to attend any public school in any district in the State, provided the school boards of both districts have agreed to participate in the program. Students' applications could be rejected only if there is no available space or if additional students would upset school plans to reduce racial imbalance.

While this two-part approach to choice is far-reaching and significant in many respects, I would like to go much further with parental choice in Wisconsin. Choice in America's schools is a critically important

issue, and its time has finally come, and we need to push it. This is the next major step in reforming our educational system, and I am proud to be here with all of you who share this vision of the future.

White House Workshop on Choice in Education

WORKSHOP PROGRAM

Welcoming Remarks
The Honorable Dan L. Crippen
Assistant to the President for Domestic Affairs

Video: Choice in Education (ABC News)

Presentations: What Choice Means to Me

Moderator: Jack Klenk
Director, Issues Analysis Staff
Office of the Under Secretary
U.S. Department of Education

Students: Andre Lawrence
East Harlem, New York

Chris Wilcox
North Branch, Minnesota

Sophia Alvarez
San Francisco, California

Program Overview
The Honorable Franmarie Kennedy-Keel
Deputy Assistant to the President for Policy Development

President Ronald Reagan
Introduced by The Honorable Ken Duberstein
Chief of Staff to the President

The Honorable Lauro F. Cavazos
Secretary of Education
Introduced by The Honorable Franmarie Kennedy-Keel

The Honorable Rudy Perpich
Governor of Minnesota
Introduced by John Chubb
Senior Fellow, Brookings Institution

Panel: Improving Schools:
Reforming American Education Through Choice

Chair: The Honorable William M. Bulger
President, Massachusetts State Senate

Panelists: Sister Elizabeth Avalos
Teacher, Mercy High School, San Francisco

Seymour Fliegel
President, Sy Fliegel Associates
Senior Fellow, Manhattan Institute
Formerly Director of Alternative Schools, District 4, East Harlem

Charles Glenn, Jr.
Executive Director, Office of Educational Equity
Massachusetts Department of Education

Denis Doyle
Senior Research Fellow, Hudson Institute

Video: The MacNeil/Lehrer Report on Education

The Honorable Tommy G. Thompson
Governor of Wisconsin
Introduced by Michael Joyce
President, Bradley Foundation

Panel: Empowering Parents: Working Together for Choice in Education

Chair: The Honorable Lamar Alexander
President, University of Tennessee
Former Governor of Tennessee

Panelists: Jackie Ducote
Executive Vice President
Louisiana Association of Business and Industry

Joyce Duncan
Director, East Harlem Career Academy

Robert Woodson
President, National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise

Joe Nathan
Senior Fellow, Humphrey Institute for Public Affairs
University of Minnesota

Vice President George Bush
Introduced by The Honorable Craig Fuller
Chief of Staff to the Vice President

Wrapup Remarks
The Honorable Franmarie Kennedy-Keel

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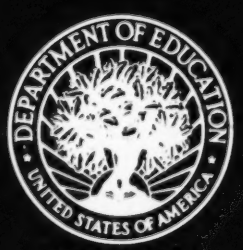
FOURTH CLASS BOOK RATE



PIP 89-002